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ABSTRACT

Involvement of the church in rural community life was investigated by examining the "Fifty-Year Index to Rural Sociology." Findings revealed that 43 separate articles were published from 1944 to 1977 under categories of community life (7 articles); ministers: elite control (4); attitudes (5); beliefs, practices (6); churches (6); church membership, participation (3); church organization (6); development, maintenance of religious communities (4); fertility behavior (2); ministers (5); and social participation (5). Some articles were included under more than one heading. The study indicated that since the provision of services has shifted from local to more distant agencies, the church has filled gaps which federal and state programs have left. Five examples of church involvement in rural Tennessee areas included: (1) Reelfoot Rural Ministry (providing transportation services to a community center for northwestern Tennessee); (2) Appalachian Community Development, which involves 48 groups in art/culture, services, construction, citizen action, education, job training, income generating, agriculture, coalitions, land acquisition, and communications projects; (3) Mountain Women's Exchange, which provides a network for sharing ideas/resources and developing educational and job programs for rural women; (4) Commission on Religion in Appalachia through which 17 churches build community and combat poverty; and (5) Jellico Community Hospital, a Seventh Day Adventist owned facility. A bibliography of the 43 journal articles is included. (NEC)

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The Church and Rural Tennessee

by

Charles L. Cleland

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Paper presented at meeting of Rural Sociological Society, Madison, WI, August 13, 1987

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THE CHURCH AND RURAL TENNESSEE *

Charles L. Cleland **

INTRODUCTION: Focus on the journal

According to the Fifty-Year Index to Rural Sociology, articles on the church and/or religion in rural areas could be classified into eleven categories:

CATEGORY	No. of Articles	Most recent
1. Community Life	7	1944
2. Ministers: Elite Control	4	1954
3. Attitudes	5	1981
4. Beliefs, Practices	6	1961
5. Churches	6	1970
6. Church Membership, Participation	3	1958
7. Church Organization	6	1972
8. Development, Maintenance of Religious Communities	4	1973
9. Fertility Behavior	2	1963
10. Ministers	5	1977
11. Social Participation	5	1957

To get the grand total of 53 some of these articles were included under more than one heading. There were in fact 43 separate articles including comments on other articles and responses to those comments. The entire list of these, alphabetized by author is attached if anyone should care to take a look at them.

No one type of topic dominates this list but the one with the largest number also happens to have the oldest date for the most recent article dealing with the topic: community life, 1944. These articles dealt with the extensiveness of the involvement of the church in the many aspects of the community. As the country's population has become more urbanized, this type of essentially descriptive article has become less acceptable as reflecting "scientific" rural sociology.

Of course there are many other places where writings about the church can appear including TRS. In the most recent issue of TRS there is an article on "Fieldwork in Swaziland" which contains a very interesting observation on the functioning of the church in that situation: "The missionaries' ability to go beyond denominational coffers to secure funding from AID and the EEC put our academic grantsmanship skills to shame." [Hickey and Hickey, p.328]

BEYOND THE CONGREGATION

What I am attempting to do here is to call to your attention some of the ways in which the church is still involved in many aspects of the community but in ways which are consistent with the increasing complexity of the organization of the larger society. Changes during the last

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half century have greatly facilitated personal travel and communication and, consequently, there have been changes in the size of the social unit that takes responsibility for the needs of individuals in distressing situations. Of course the government, especially at the federal level, has been assuming increasing responsibility for providing goods and services to those with particular needs. Along with this has come a large increase in the numbers of people employed to administer the dissemination of those goods and services and in the complexity of the regulations under which they function. It is a system which serves a great many people well but it also has its flaws which make for some very strange omissions.

Since the provision of some essential services has shifted from local sources to sources which are more distant, the church has shifted to filling in the gaps which the federal and state programs have left. In purely spiritual matters, the local church is still supreme whether it be congregationally organized or more centralized and this is the most visible aspect of the church today. There are still congregations of various sizes with their individual physical structures in which they worship. They provide a continuing opportunity for regular local social interaction for all of the members of the family in ways that other institutions do not. They provide support for the institution of the family and often act as a support group for those whose family members are not close for whatever reason.

There are five examples of church involvement in rural areas that I have encountered in recent weeks and years that I would like to call to your attention. These include the Reelfoot Rural Ministry, Appalachian Community Development, the Appalachian Women's Exchange, the Commission on Religion in Appalachia and the Jellico Community Hospital.

I also want to comment briefly on the fact that the church is still a human institution and as a result is subject to all those foibles of human nature that effect human relations. Specifically, in some communities the church, in this instance meaning specific congregations, contributes more to divisiveness than to collective care for all of the members of the community. One situation was called to my attention by a fellow action oriented citizen of Knoxville, TN. It involved two congregations in a small community that had gotten to the point that they not only disagreed with one another on theological matters but they had become so emotionally involved in those differences that they were no longer speaking to each other. Needless to say this had a very chilling effect on any effort by either insiders or outsiders to bring about any kind of needed social or economic change.

REELFOOT RURAL MINISTRY

The bulk of the information in this section comes from a special report prepared by Rev. Wm. Larry Tubb, Executive Director of the Ministry. This was supplemented by personal contact with a number of officials and professionals in the area served by the Ministry in 1985.

The Reelfoot Rural Ministry is located in the northwestern part of Tennessee and serves most of three counties - Lake, Obion and Dyer. It started as a project of concerned Methodists who became aware of the serious needs of rural residents in the area. First, there was a small effort on the part of volunteers from two churches to work with people in the area who needed assistance in food, shelter or transportation. This grew into a mission with the employment of a deaconess who could devote full time to the local concerns. Behind this employment was a lay council with representatives from eleven Methodist churches and a staff consisting of four ministers, the chairperson of the lay council and the "rural church and community worker."

There was some strain within some of the participating churches as to the appropriateness of this social outreach for the expenditure of funds contributed to the church as those most directly involved were continually seeking more money to better serve the needs they had identified. Eventually one of those needs was for a physical structure from which and within which the work could be done.

About this time the decision was made, with the approval of the Methodist Conference that had jurisdiction over the area, that a nonprofit and state chartered organization should be established to carry on the work of the Ministry. It became such in December of 1970 and it was this organization that broke ground for a building in 1972. The building was financed by the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and it immediately became a community center. Funding for the programs of the center continued to come from the Conference.

The existence of this service organization and the relative independence of their operation made the decision to apply for Title XX funds an easy one when the opportunity arose. Clearly there were services that could be provided for which a need was evident that support from the church could not fund. The program at the new building was very limited and Title XX funds could make for much more extensive utilization of the facility. The first allocation came in 1976.

Along with the Title XX funds came a new level of accountability: to governmental agencies as well as to the church. It also called for some restructuring of the Ministry staff including some additions to keep up with the record keeping that became necessary. The center became very active with extensive provision of transportation for a variety of purposes and numerous activities at the center itself.

With the vicissitudes of governmental funding of programs, the prospects of dramatic reductions of Title XX funding caused some serious searching for ways to continue the services that had been developed and that local residents had come to expect. There was great reluctance to cut out anything because each service was recognized as being needed. The possibility of locating alternative sources of funds was diligently explored as the commitment to serving the needs of the rural poor made simply discarding the services an unacceptable alternative. Some reductions have been made but the spirit of the church serving the needs of rural needy people remains with encouragement from the church organizational hierarchy.

APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Appalachian Community Development is the name given to an effort by Marie Cirillo for work in the mountains of East Tennessee which is supported by the Catholic Church. According to a brief (three page) typewritten statement about the work, the work has been supported by the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Nashville since 1967. The statement includes something of the philosophy under which Marie has been working with special attention to "development" as process as well as product. She notes that from the point of view of the church the emphasis is on process, with helping people to learn to help themselves. For other agencies and organizations, including governmental, development emphasizes product. This is something which can be measured as having happened: something that can be seen or added up or otherwise quantified. Appearances are nearly always included in the definition of development as product. One comment overheard in a discussion about rural development mentioned the painting of rural mailboxes as almost an essential element. A product people can see!

The statement includes as list of the various self-help initiatives during the twenty years of the existence of the Appalachian Community Development effort. Forty-eight different groups involved in eleven different categories of projects are listed with an indication that some of them are no longer in existence. The eleven categories into which the local initiatives have been classified are as follows:

1. ART/CULTURE
2. SERVICES
3. CONSTRUCTION
4. CITIZEN ACTION
5. EDUCATION
6. JOB TRAINING
7. INCOME GENERATING
8. AGRICULTURE
9. COALITIONS
10. LAND ACQUISITION
11. COMMUNICATIONS

The statement also includes an indication of the values manifested in the community, the various agencies involved and the church involvement. The values mentioned include the importance of independence and community; the family and its extension into the community; the promotion of education by groups; and group support of men, women, children and the land. Agencies involved in the various efforts include (among others) the Federation of Communities in Service (FOCIS), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Vanderbilt Student Health Coalition

Under church involvement there is an indication of the ecumenical nature of this effort. While Marie's salary is paid by the Catholic diocese, other churches have formed partnerships with various groups to assist in the group endeavors: an Episcopal church and a child care center; a Presbyterian church and the Community Land Trust; the Methodist church in women's projects; and then donations of money, goods or labor from Baptist, Episcopal, Catholic, Lutheran and Jewish congregations.

MOUNTAIN WOMEN'S EXCHANGE

[FROM A BROCHURE ABOUT THE MOUNTAIN WOMEN'S EXCHANGE]

"MOUNTAIN WOMEN'S EXCHANGE began as a coalition of community based organizations comprised mainly of local low-income women in Whitley County, Ky. and Campbell County, Tn.--organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life in rural communities.

"Through the nurturing of these community groups, MOUNTAIN WOMEN'S EXCHANGE evolved from a networking tool into a unique collaborative approach to community development.

"The purpose of the Exchange is to work with rural women who want to participate as co-creators in their own development and the development of their communities. The Exchange serves these women by supporting their efforts, providing a network through which ideas and resources can be shared and developing programs which provide jobs and education for rural women."

What the brochure does not say is that a major part of the support for the continued functioning of the Exchange comes from the Commission On Religion in Appalachia (CORA). The resources that CORA has to dispense are obtained from the seventeen denominational groups that have joined together to better coordinate their efforts to assist in the alleviation of problems in Appalachia. While CORA's area of concern is geographically coterminous with that of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), there is no financial connection between the two.

Here is another instance of the church, religion if you will, exerting efforts in low-income rural areas to be of genuine assistance in ways other than dealing exclusively with matters of the spirit. With a minimum of investment, the people in these disadvantaged areas are developing the skills needed to contribute significantly to resolution of their own problems, social, political and economic. There are certainly opportunities to convey the spiritual message that goes with such investment of the church's resources.

COMMISSION ON RELIGION IN APPALACHIA

[From Atlas of the Church in Appalachia, Commission on Religion in Appalachia, Knoxville, TN, May 1983]

"Since its inception, the Commission on Religion in Appalachia's holistic sense of mission has required it to inform its practical work with reflections based on theological, sociological, and demographical research and information.

"The ATLAS OF THE CHURCH IN APPALACHIA - 1983 is part of a continuing effort to remain informed through demographic research. For some, data is nothing but lifeless, dry material to be avoided whenever possible. The word 'data', however, in Latin means 'what is given, hence gift'.

"CORA considers this ATLAS a gift because each number is a symbol which identifies the people, members of the church, throughout the region who are both givers and receivers of love, service and kindness. These people are CORA's principle resource in its contribution toward building a better world." (p.iii)

"CORA is a cooperative strategy of regional ministry. It was formed in 1965 by a coalition of seventeen church bodies seeking to address the pressing needs of Appalachia. By combining the resources of the churches with those of the people of the region, CORA works to build community and combat poverty.

"This ecumenical organization works from a holistic sense of mission. It goes beyond the symptoms of problems to the causes of existing injustices, to deal with the religious and moral implications inherent in the economic, social, cultural conditions in the Appalachian region.

"CORA seeks to achieve its goals by: sponsoring consultation between knowledgeable persons where information and concerns can be shared; advocating funds and other means of support for grassroots organizations; entering into research, conducting studies and designing educational programs and publications to expand understanding of the conditions of the Appalachian region and to give guidance to programs of the churches." (p. v)

CORA organizes its efforts through three divisions or thrusts: the Appalachian Development Projects Committee, the Social, Economic and Political Issues Task Force and the Parish Development program. The Appalachian Women's Exchange is clearly in line with types of activities in which CORA is engaged. Others include such things as cooperative home building in rural areas and promotion of specialty agricultural programs suited to low-income families that will at least improve their own well being if not provide some additional income.

The concluding paragraph of the description of what the Commission on Religion in Appalachia is all about notes that while the "War on Poverty" has lost its appeal politically, this ecumenical effort continues. "A long time CORA member and worker recently referred to it as 'a bright, enduring, and growing symbol of the ecumenical church'."

JELLICO COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

The Jellico Community Hospital is a fifty-bed facility located in Jellico, Tennessee, which is a rugged area about 60 miles north of Knoxville. While an interstate highway runs through Jellico proper, the other roads in the area are much more difficult to navigate making it a rather isolated area for all practical purposes. While the name of the hospital suggests that it might be a publicly owned facility, it is, in fact, owned and operated by the Seventh Day Adventists and is thus an activity of the church in a rural area (Jellico's population is under 2500 with the total county population being about 35,000).

The church involvement in this operation makes some of the decisions about the services offered more understandable than they might be otherwise. For example, most of the rural hospitals in this part of Tennessee and neighboring Kentucky have gone out of the business of obstetrics on the grounds that the financial liability is too great. This hospital continues to provide the service in spite of such a threat on the grounds that the service is badly needed in the area.

At the same time there are some financial realities that the hospital must face that causes services to be delayed or denied until the patient can come up with some means for paying for them. The hospital has a policy of a sliding scale based on ability to pay. This policy is not broadly publicized with the result that a number of potential patients delay using the services, sometimes resulting in a matter that might have been relatively minor becoming a major problem that is much more expensive to deal with. But ways can be found to pay for the major costs frequently when the minor charges for preventive or remedial treatment cannot be met.

CONCLUSIONS

These examples amply demonstrate that the church is very much at work in low-income rural areas, frequently in ways that do not call a lot of attention to those responsible. This is very consistent with the expressed intent of many church bodies to render service to those in need in ways that will truly help the needy rather than bringing praise and recognition to those providing the assistance. This can be done when there is someone available to do the work and a church body or bodies that are willing to provide the support for that person to do work that may be very controversial with a minimum of advertising that they are doing so and without interest in financial profit from the activity.

It is unfortunate that there is a need for such complex arrangements for assistance but it speaks well for the individuals who are willing and able to commit themselves to such endeavors and for the leaders of the church bodies that are willing to open themselves to possible criticism for their support of such activities.

LIST OF JOURNAL ARTICLES

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Buie, T. S., The Land and the Rural Church, 9:251-257.

Bultena, Louis, Rural Churches and Community Integration, 9:257-264.

Burchard, Waldo W., A Comparison of Urban and Rural Churches, 28:271-278.

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Cisin, Ira H., Comment on: An Application of Scale Analysis to the Study of Religious Groups by Coughenour. 20:208-211.

Comfort, Richard O., Survey of Activities and Training of Selected Rural Ministers in the United States, 12:375-387.

Coughenour, C. M., An Application of Scale Analysis to the Study of Religious Groups, 20:197-207. Rejoinder to Cisin, 20:211.

Cummings, Scott, Richard Briggs and James Mercy, Preachers Versus Teachers: Local-Cosmopolitan Conflict over Textbook Censorship in an Appalachian Community, 42:7-21.

Dyer, William G., Development of a Mormon Line Community, 21:25-28.

Dynes, Russell R., Rurality, Migration, and Sectarianism, 21:25-28.

Fisher, Elliot L., A Church-Centered Community, 7:445-446.

Hollingshead, A. B., The Life Cycle of Nebraska Rural Churches, 2:180-191.

Hassinger, Edward W., Changes in the Number of Rural Churches in Missouri, 1952-1967, 35:354-366.

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Hickey, Jo Ann D., and Anthony A. Hickey, "Fieldwork in Swaziland: True Confessions - and More, TRS 7:325-329.

Holik, John S., An Index of Religious Group Action, 22:268-270.

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Hostetler, John A., Old World Extinction and New World Survival of the Amish: A Study of Group Maintenance and Dissolution, 20:212-219.

Kan, Stephen H., and Yun Kim, Religious Affiliation and Migration Intentions in Nonmetropolitan Utah, 56:669-687.

Nelsen, Hart M., Civil Rights Attitudes of Rural and Urban Presbyterians, 35:161-174.

Nelsen, Hart M., Rural-Urban Differences in Religiosity, 36:389-391.

Nelson, Lowry, Education and the Changing Size of Mormon Families, 17:335-342.

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Nuesse, C. Joseph, Recent Catholic Fertility in Rural Wisconsin, 28:379-393.

Obenhaus, Victor, W. Widick Schroeder and Charles D. England, Church Participation Related to Social Class and Type of Center, 23:298-308.

Obenhaus, Victor and W. Widick Schroeder, Church Affiliation and Attitudes Toward Selected Public Questions in a Typical Midwest County, 28:35-47.

O'Day, Thomas F., The Effects of Geographical Position on Belief and Behavior in a Rural Mormon Village, 19:358-364.

Roberts, Harry W., The Rural Negro Minister: His Work and His Salary, 12:284-297.

Rodehaver, Myles W., Ministers on the Move; A Study of Mobility in Church Leadership, 13:400-410.

Roy, Prodipto, The Sacred Cow in India, 20:8-15.

Schaffer, Albert, The Rural Church in a Metropolitan Area, 24:236-245. Shissler, Henry, An Experiment in Attitudinal Outcomes Resulting from Seminary Courses in "The Church and Community," 22:250-257.

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Smith, Wilford E., The Urban Threat to Mormon Norms, 24:355-361.

Stoltzfus, Victor, Amish Agriculture: Adaptive Strategies for Economic Survival of Community Life, 38:428-235.

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Tripp, Thomas Alfred, Rural Churches and the War, 7:210-211.

Wolters, Gilbert, The Human Crop of a Rural Catholic Parish, 21:297-298.